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## **Mindscape Commons [e-resource review]**

Kevin McDonough

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ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

# Mindscape Commons

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Date of Review: June 5, 2021

Composite Score: ★★★★★

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## Abstract

Developed by Coherent Digital, Mindscape Commons provides a platform for VR content relating to the health sciences, counseling, psychology, and social work. Content is either commercial, Open Access, research based, or exclusively developed by Coherent Digital. The VR experiences are available as 180/360 videos or animations, visible within a browser screen, through dedicated head mounted displays (HMD) from Oculus, and smartphones in conjunction with Google Cardboard. Experiences can be searched, browsed, and accessed from Mindscape Commons' website and there are abundant filters to refine your results. The most valuable content is related to counseling simulations and was developed by Coherent Digital in conjunction with Mercer University and Penn State University. Being able to view content within HMDs is somewhat tricky, but the feeling of immersion and realism is greater. Pricing is reasonable considering the marketplace for educational VR content, and the number of experiences is expected to grow.

## Pricing Options

Subscription options, or memberships as Coherent Digital refers to them, are available on a one-year, three-year, or perpetual basis. Content includes access to all interactive simulations, immersive experiences, VR microcases, and support materials such as teaching guides and assessments. Content is continually growing, and all content added during a membership year is included. In addition, as a paid member an institution can add entries for VR experiences in Mindscape Commons, with outside links to institutional sites hosting the projects. Submissions can also include help files, teaching aids, articles, book chapters, and previews. More importantly, institutional members can upload up to 20 VR experiences a year hosted in Mindscape Commons. Coherent Digital is anticipating this collaborative approach will help accelerate VR development.

Pricing ranges as follows for institutional members:

**Option 1:** One-year memberships range from \$3,500 to \$10,000. These are scaled to library type, and will be discounted further in consortium offers.

**Option 2:** Five-year membership for the price of three years as a Founding Member offer through 2021. Price ranges from \$10,500 to \$30,000.

**Option 3:** Perpetual purchase or Founding Member/Owner. Price ranges from \$19,000 to \$42,500. This option provides libraries with perpetual rights to all the Coherent-created video content; the third-party licensed videos; and all the associated non-video content (assessment questions, teaching guides, support texts, etc.).

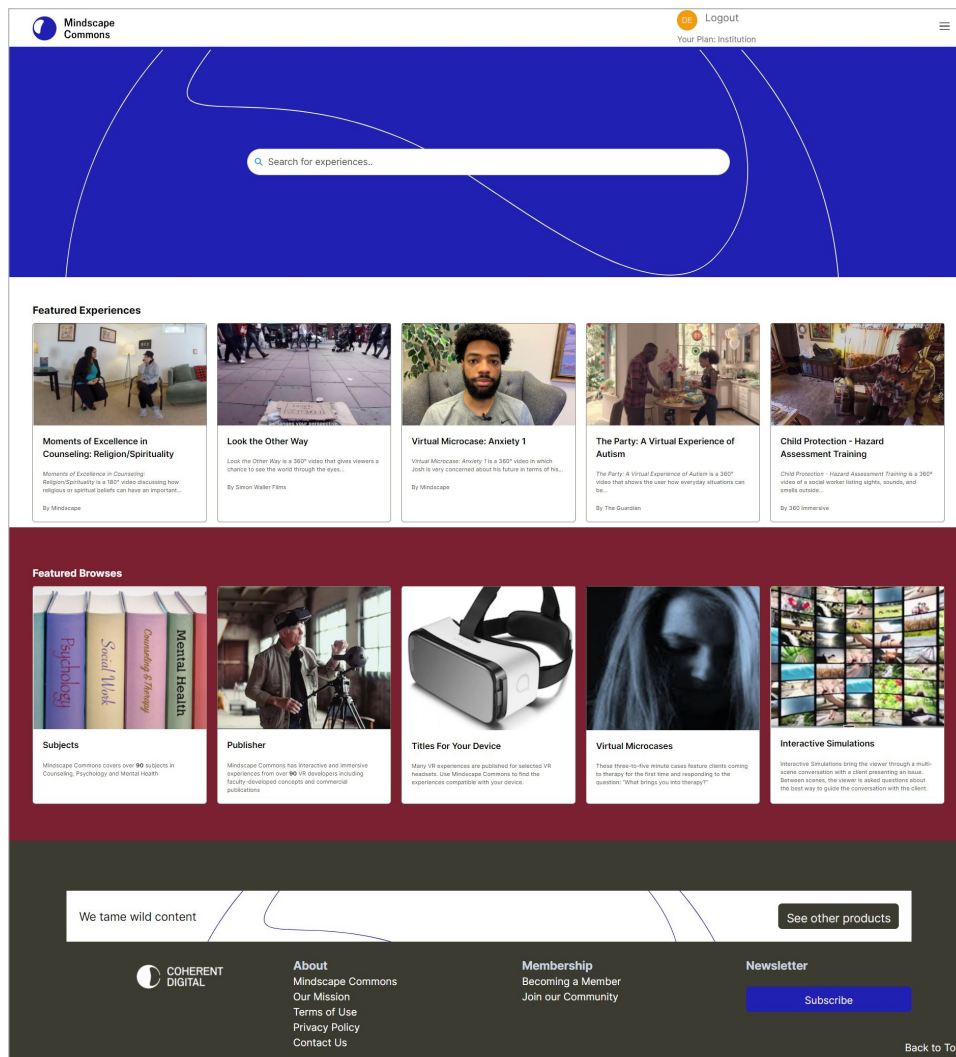
## Product Overview/Description

Mindscape Commons is the first online resource to bring together educationally based, virtual reality content related to health sciences, counseling, psychology, and social work. Through 180/360 videos, some proving interaction through questions or facilitation from trained counselors, viewers can understand the confusion that occurs with Alzheimer's patients, the complexities of working with clients who experienced sexual trauma, or the difficulties of a social worker conducting home assessments. Since these are staged experiences with actual people in a video setting, these simulations (see <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=x64oEubLb30&feature=youtu.be>>) appear very real and impactful, particularly when viewed within a virtual reality headset.

At this writing there are approximately 192 experiences, and these are growing regularly. Content fits into four categories: Mindscape Commons exclusive content, Open Access, commercial, and research projects. Experiences developed exclusively for Mindscape Commons subscribers is the real gem, particularly Virtual Microcases and Interactive Simulations, which were developed with input from therapists and other practitioners. The experiences also provide interactivity, teachers guides, and assessments to gauge comprehension of the viewers. Currently there are approximately 58 of these types of experiences, and Coherent Digital hopes to develop or license an additional 45 experiences or so within the next year.

Virtual Microcases are short, three- to four-minute client cases addressing issues such as anger, anxiety, depression, relationship issues, grief and loss, sexual trauma, substance use, and suicidal thoughts. They have limited interactivity and mainly serve to present a client with particular issues and then at the end ask the viewer to rate how competent or skilled they believe they are to work with this client. Virtual Microcases come with accompanying instructor guides with suggestions on how to use the cases for students in different courses—theory, ethics, professional skills—and include questions for self-reflection.

Interactive Simulations are longer, 15-minute interactive experiences that demonstrate positive relationship techniques and tailor therapy to the specific client's characteristics. The simulations address empathy, goal setting, positive regard, alliance ruptures, stages of change, culture, coping style, client preferences, religion and spirituality, suicide, and more. Viewers interact with the content through questions that help identify a client's issue, predict the best pathway forward, and anticipate a client's response. As with the Virtual Microcases, a teacher's guide accompanies each simulation. However, the approach is different, providing an overview of theories addressed in the simulation, including relevant scholarly literature, and following with a transcript and some multiple choice and short answer/discussion ques-



**FIGURE 1** Mindscape Commons Home Page

tions. Another advantage of the longer Simulations over Microcases is that they are facilitated by Carlos Zalaquett, a professor of counseling education at Penn State University. Carlos gives context to the sessions by briefly addressing underlying theories, and uses viewers responses to questions to provide feedback, helping train them into more effective counselors.

Close to 30% of the content in Mindscape Commons is open access, which typically takes the form of 360 videos, created by individuals, organizations, or institutions and made available on YouTube. Fifty-eight of the experiences are classified as commercial, whereby Mindscape Commons links to VR content developed by organizations (profit or non-profit) to help treat mental health issues or train people to become better practitioners. Coherent Digital does not license this content, but rather directs users to providers' product information pages. For content of interest you will have to contact vendors individually for access, equipment requirements, and any associated costs. The remaining 10% of content on Mindscape Commons is research projects, or virtual projects created by faculty and students in the area of mental health. As with commercial content, you are linked to the provider, or to news releases on the VR experience. Similarly, you will have to contact researchers to see about possibilities of using the experiences at your own institution. Since paid members to

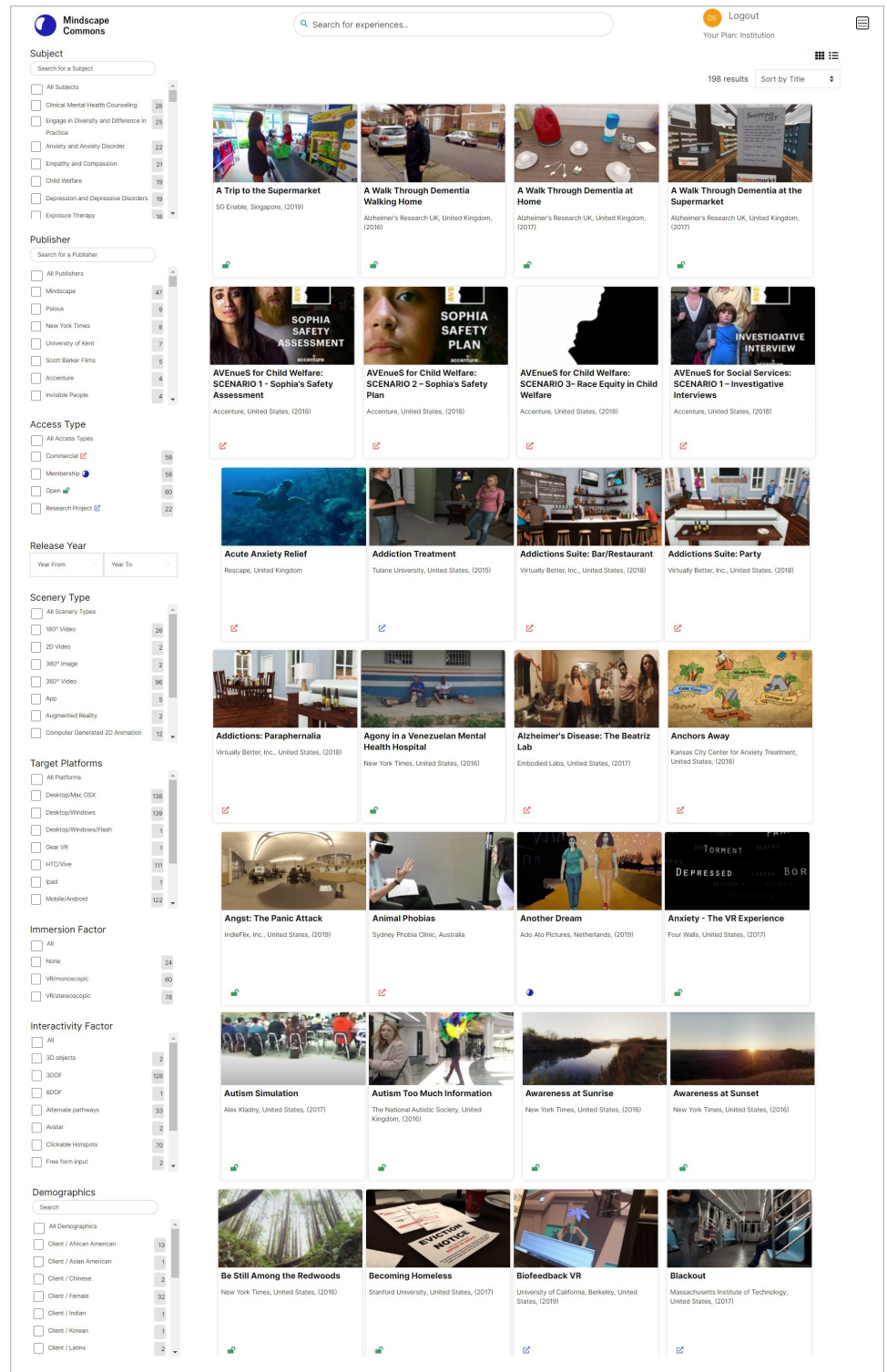
Mindscape Commons can upload unlimited projects, it is expected this type of experience will grow as the product does, correspondingly allowing educators and organizations to discover nascent VR experiences that can be of use to their students or as training aids.

All accessible experiences on Mindscape Commons can be viewed in your browser (desktop, laptop, tablet or phone; Windows, IOS or Android), or by using a third-party app, Uptale, on common VR headsets (Oculus Go, Quest, and Rift; HTC Vive) and phones using VR assisted devices like Google Cardboard.

## User Interface/Navigation/Searching

Coherent Digital made the choice to offer Mindscape Commons' VR content to as many platforms as possible, including Windows and Mac computers; Android and IOS phones; and Oculus Rift, Go, and Quest headsets. This decision was made possible by primarily focusing on content created in 180/360 degree videos, and made available on the Mindscape Commons website. The Mindscape Commons home page directs users' attention to a search bar at the center of the page, where they can enter keywords to retrieve VR experiences (see Figure 1). Scrolling down you get five featured experiences based on content created or licensed by Coherent Digital. Further down are featured

**FIGURE 2** Mindscape Commons  
All Title View with Filtering  
Options



browse options where you can find experiences by subject, publisher, specific viewing devices, and the exclusively developed content, Virtual Microcases, and Interactive Simulations. There is an option to browse all titles, but this feature is unfortunately hidden beneath three horizontal lines in the top right corner of the page. Coherent Digital said they are looking to move the menu bar to make it more prominent in a future enhancement.

When viewing all titles the left hand navigation bar gives extensive filtering options, by subject, publishers, access type (membership, commercial, research project, and open access), release date, scenery type (e.g., 360 video, augmented reality, computer generated animation, etc.), target platform (Mac, Oculus Rift, etc.), immersion and interactivity factors, and demographics of the clients portrayed in the experiences (see Figure 2). Unfortunately, the full filtering options do



Mindscape Commons

Search for experiences...

Browse by Subject > Search > Virtual Microcase: Anxiety 2

Virtual Microcase: Anxiety 2

2020 • 360° Video • 4m 29s

Watch in HMD

Preview

Tyler Wilkinson

Mindscape

Click on "View in 360°" above to start the experience

Summary

Virtual Microcase: Anxiety 2 is a 360° video in which Mia just started college and misses her family. She has always been a worrier but her symptoms seem to be getting worse. A recent incident - when her mother did not arrive at a designated time for dinner together - threw Mia into a panic.

Virtual Microcases allow viewers to immerse themselves into a client's story in a safe and controlled setting. Students and faculty can review the effects of the experiences, making learners more prepared for field experience and eventual work with clients.

Subject

Panic and Panic Disorder  
Clinical Mental Health  
Counseling (CACREP)  
Anxiety and Anxiety Disorder

Collections

Virtual Microcases

Demographics

Client / African American  
Client / Female

Interactivity Factors

3DOF  
Clickable Hotspots

Access Type

Membership

Immersion Factors

VR/monoscopic

Transcript

search transcript

[Client]  
Well, I've, I mean I've always kind of been a worrier, but um since I started college a few months ago, it's gotten to the point where I feel like I don't really have a handle on it anymore.  
And it's kind of started to control me more than I feel like I can control it. Um, it's just like um living away from home, it's really stressful.  
I'm very close to my family so not knowing if they're okay or like what they're doing I don't know it brings me a lot of fear. Like my thoughts are always just about what could possibly go wrong.  
Or, like all the time it's like just constant chatter in my mind. I can't get it to stop. Um, like the other day my mom was supposed to come pick me up and get dinner together.  
And she told me she would be there at 7:00 p.m., and she didn't get there until 8:30. So the whole time, I was just like worried. I called her I think 12 times and she wasn't picking up.  
I mean my heart was like in my chest. My palms were getting sweaty. I mean I felt like I couldn't get

Supplemental Materials

Transcript

Teacher Materials

Journal Article

Part of

Series

Virtual Microcases

Unique to Mindscape Commons, Virtual Microcases are substantially more effective than written case studies in textbooks, because they're authentic, immersive, and experiential. Each three- to four-minute client case has been developed with leading therapists. Clients present with anger, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, depression, identity, relationship issues, trauma, grief, and more—contributing to a growing "virtual library of emotions" that can be experienced on demand. VR

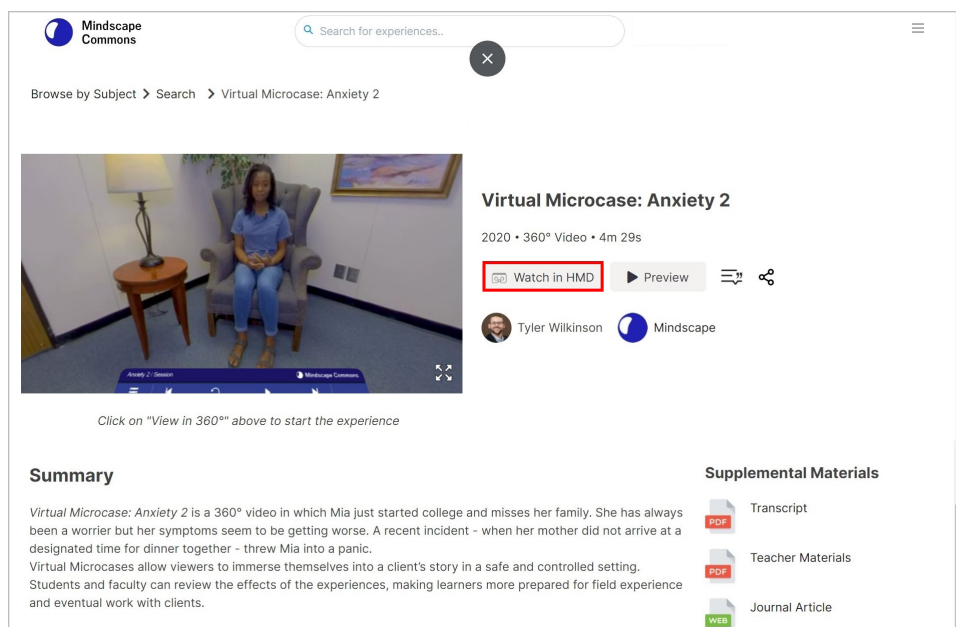
not yet appear under other browsing options--subject, publisher, and titles by VR device. That is unfortunate, but these browse options do include the most important filter, access type, so that you can quickly view the most accessible experiences, which are those developed by Coherent Digital (e.g. membership) or publicly available 180/360 videos on YouTube.

Clicking on an individual title provides the viewer with a summary of the experience, any supplemental materials, and options to view the experience (see Figure 3). In addition, one can get the code to embed content in a course management system, preformatted APA and MLA citations, and share links to the experience via Facebook and Twitter. By clicking in the viewing window, you can see the experience as a

**FIGURE 3** Mindscape Commons Experience Selection

180/360 degree video in your browser, or the Watch in HMD option (see Figure 4) allows you to view it on a supported VR headset.

Although viewing the experience within the browser window is no different than on YouTube, using your mouse to turn your gaze one direction or the other, the process with an HMD isn't very intuitive or convenient. To do so you need to install a third-party app, Uptale Player. If using an Oculus Quest, you send an e-mail to <support@uptale.io> with the email address of your Oculus account. After confirming your request, the app appears as a "not installed" app in your library. For the Oculus Go, you log into your Oculus account via your phone and then redeem a code sent to you by Uptale. For an Oculus Rift or HTC Vive, you install the Uptale app on the computer to

**FIGURE 4** Mindscape Commons Viewing Window**FIGURE 5** Mindscape Commons Floating Navigation within Experience

which the HMD is connected and then either open the app before putting on your headset, or while the headset is on using the virtual browser option.

Now the process gets a little more clunky. Normally, you would expect the Uptale app to function as any other VR app to locate and view content in Mindscape Commons. However, that is not the case. You have to find an experience on the Mindscape Commons' website, either by using the virtual browser in your headset, a browser on the desktop/laptop computer that you are running the Uptale app (e.g., for the Oculus Rift and Rift S headsets), or on your phone. From within the experience's web page there is a "Watch in HMD" option at the top of the screen. Clicking on this you are given a code to enter in the Uptale app. Make sure to write the code down or you will likely enter it incorrectly as this reviewer did on more than one occasion. Of course, to write and view the code on your paper, you need to remove the headset or peak under the edge. Once you enter the code, the experience needs to download. On my Oculus Quest (first generation),

it took seven minutes or so to download a 586 MB experience. That was with a wireless connection running at 30 mbps. When I was getting close to 200 mbps from my wireless connect at the university, a 230 MB experience loaded in about a minute and a half.

Once the experience loads, it appears the same as the browser experience, but by turning your head you can look around 180 or 360 degrees, depending on the experience. For Mindscape Commons' exclusive content both the website and headset experiences have floating navigation, allowing you to jump to another section, but not fast forward or rewind within the experience (see Figure 5). Navigation within other experiences is totally dependent on the provider. Three-hundred-sixty degree videos in YouTube can easily be moved forward or back as desired by the viewer.

Accessibility for audio and vision impaired individuals is limited, particularly for the VR experiences. For content developed by Coherent Digital there is a text transcript, but closed captions are not



## Mindscape Commons Review Scores Composite: ★★★★★

*The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.*

### Content: ★★★★★ 1/2

Collection of open source, commercial, research, and exclusively-developed content related to counseling and mental health. Coherent Digital's own Virtual Microcases and Interactive Simulations are high quality, interactive VR experiences with guidance and support materials for instructors. Experiences are viewable in the browser or with a VR headset.

### User Interface/Searchability: ★★★ 1/2

Experiences are found through a prominently placed search bar on Mindscape Commons' website or browsing preselected categories. Extensive filters allow one to refine results. Browsing all titles is a hidden feature, and viewing VR experiences on HMDs is neither intuitive nor expedient.

### Pricing: ★★★★★

Pricing seems reasonable for the extensive educational VR content. Also, there are annual and five year subscriptions, and a perpetual purchase option.

### Purchase/Contract Options: ★★★★★

Standard library contract provisions including custom branding, MARC records and Counter 5 reports. VR experiences cannot be shared outside of the subscriber's institution. Supporting materials, if available are available to loan. Content can be embedded into course management systems.

provided in the immersive experiences. Coherent Digital's full VPAT compliance is available by request from Coherent Digital.

## Critical Evaluation

Mindscape Commons is unique in providing a clearinghouse for VR content related to mental health. Educational content for virtual reality is often hard to find through typical distribution channels such as Steam, or the Oculus and Viveport libraries. Educational content frequently develops out of universities and research labs like Stanford's Virtual Human Interaction Lab. Sometimes this content appears in the traditional gaming or VR libraries, but much of it is hard to find, located through word of mouth after librarians or faculty attend presentations at conferences, or read articles in journal articles. Coherent Digital is the first company to pull commercial, research based, and open source VR content together in a focused product for counseling, social work, psychology, health sciences, and related programs. For this reason alone, they should be praised.

Another positive is the excellent content developed by Coherent Digital in conjunction with researchers at Penn State University and Mercer University. It provides good initial training for counseling students on their level of comfort and knowledge in dealing with particular issues and clients. In-person experiences will still be required at some level, but for undergraduates, simulations help provide a more impactful learning experience than case studies. Coherent Digital is planning to develop significantly more content in the near future, and this reviewer hopes they will expand their scope beyond counseling. Although there are experiences on being a gay couple in Egypt, what it is like to be homeless or while waiting for asylum, and two experiences on social workers doing site inspections, most of the content is counseling based. Expanding the social work component to include more site visit training would be very helpful, particularly on how to respond to angry, defensive, and deceptive par-

ents. Although Mindscape Commons links to some commercial providers that provide these experiences, those require additional costs. It would also be helpful to provide more experiences on what it is like to have health issues, such as Alzheimer's disease, terminal cancer, autism, etc., and how healthcare professionals can provide services to these individuals. There are some open access experiences like this on the platform, but they are restricted to 360 videos with no interactivity. Having simulations that provide skill development and encourage empathy to a broader range of disciplines within higher education would make the product even more valuable.

One area needing improvement, as mentioned previously, is more convenient access to the VR content. In their defense, Coherent Digital chose to make their content as widely accessible as possible, from smart phones using Google Cardboard to dedicated VR headsets,

**Free Text Keywords:** streaming videos | psychology | psychotherapy | therapy sessions | recorded sessions | therapeutic approaches | therapeutic technique | observation | therapist training | VR | virtual reality | 3D | counseling

**Primary Category:** Sociology, Education, Anthropology, Psychology

**Secondary Categories:** Medicine, Nursing & Health

**Type of product being reviewed:** Streaming video; Website; Other – Virtual Reality

**Target Audience:** Undergraduate (including community colleges); Graduate/Faculty/Researcher

**Access:** Hybrid (some OA)

both wired and portable. The VR industry is in flux, and has not made sufficient inroads into the consumer and educational markets to reach maturity. As a result, disarray and fragmentation of the market makes it difficult to develop standards, putting pressure on consumers who must consider whether the equipment they buy will be supported by new VR apps, and software developers who have to release separate versions of their apps for each platform. In addition VR equipment can be expensive and awkward, with motion sickness as a possibility, and significant lack of quality educational content (Jenkins 2019; Trevett and Boger 2017).

With the goal to provide as broad of VR access as possible, it is understandable Coherent Digital has challenges. The company mentioned to this reviewer on more than one occasion that VR has greater impact when users are immersed in the experience using a dedicated headset. Their own research supports this assertion, and this reviewer agrees that experiences appear more realistic through an HMD. As a result, access to the content needs to improve. Navigating between the Uptale app and Mindscape Commons' website to get a code and then wait to download the experience is bothersome. There are no instructions at the beginning of an experience to explain how to return to the Uptale home page so you can enter the code for a different experience. A faculty who wants to use these simulations in a class but is not experienced with VR or tech savvy may find the obstacles too great. At this reviewer's university, VR experiences are facilitated by the library and even with technically competent tutors guiding students through the process, it will be challenging at times. However, Coherent Digital is working on providing easier access to content in the future, and as the VR industry matures, many of these issues will be sorted out.

Another area for improvement, is to increase the clarity of the video. Currently it is grainy and blurry compared to HDTV and 4k televisions many people use to watch programs and play games. Granted, having greater clarity will enlarge the size of the experiences, effecting accessibility on portable devices, and increase the time to download an experience. Yet, there is a reason people upgrade their televisions: clarity increases realism. Realism is one of the big selling points for virtual reality, and if the industry can figure out a way to stream video based experiences in an efficient manner to various headsets, this reviewer believes the impact of this technology will be even greater.

## Competitive Products

Embodied Labs <<https://embodiedlabs.com/>> offers six simulations where the viewer becomes a senior patient with various health conditions, experiencing the challenges of interacting with family members and healthcare professionals. Other commercial companies, some linked to from within Mindscape Commons, offer very specific VR simulations. However, Mindscape Commons is the only company that serves as a portal to a wide variety of VR experiences related to mental health.

## Purchase & Contract Provisions

A review of Coherent Digital's contract provisions in a sample license showed nothing out of the ordinary and is available upon request. The

## Contact Information

### Coherent Digital

623 S Fairfax St.

Alexandria, VA 22314

E-mail: <<https://coherentdigital.net/contact-us>>

Producer URL: <<https://coherentdigital.net/>>

Product URL: <<https://mindscapecommons.net/>>

publisher reported the license includes standard language for both of their products, the other being Policy Commons. Embedding the experiences in course management systems is permitted along with interlibrary loan (ILL). However, videos are unable to be downloaded, so ILL is limited to supporting materials such as instructional guides and transcripts. Naturally, these have little use if one does not have access to the digital content.

Other common features available to institutional subscribers include custom branding, MARC records and Counter 5 reports. Coherent Digital plans to develop a LibGuide in the next year by working with librarians at different academic institutions to get insight and feedback. Feeds to discovery services are offered, compatible with Sitemap guidelines, and include a regular Sitemap and a video Sitemap. Coherent Digital eventually plans support KBART, which is a NISO Recommended Practice for content publishers to distribute metadata to discovery services. The company also supports PSI IP Registry, which makes it easy for participating institutions to update their IPs and have this information conveyed to vendors.

## Authentication

Authentication options for Mindscape Commons are TCP/IP (via PSI IP Registry), Shibboleth/SAML (including WAYFless URLs), and registered user accounts.

## Author's References

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Trevett, Neil, and Yuval Boger. 2017. "4 Myths Are Blocking Real, Needed VR Standards." *VentureBeat* (blog). August 25, 2017. <<https://venturebeat.com/2017/08/25/4-myths-getting-in-the-way-of-necessary-vr-standardization/>>

## About the Author

**Kevin McDonough** has been a reference and electronic services librarian at Northern Michigan University since 1997. He also manages the Olson Library's Digital Media Tutoring Center, which provides equipment and tutoring help on media-based projects, and a Virtual Reality area for students, faculty, and staff to experience VR and imagine possibilities. ■